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Question Time: Two years of community college free?

What do you think of President Obama's proposal?

**By Rob Burgess
Tribune night editor**

[**Editor's note:** To participate in future queries, keep an eye on our Twitter and Facebook accounts.]

Late last week, President Barack Obama made an announcement which could be a game changer for many young Americans if implemented.

"President Barack Obama's proposal to offer two years of free tuition to community college to any student that keeps up their grades would cost the federal government about \$60 billion over 10 years, White House spokesman Eric Schultz said," reported Reuters on Friday.

The program is a part of Obama's budget proposal, which is scheduled to be released Feb. 2. So, we wanted to know: "What do you think of this plan? If you're against it, do you have an alternate plan?"

Your answers

"How would that change the fact that only 1/3 of current college grads find meaningful employment?" — **Jerry Titus**

“Education, empowerment, and life without debt for the common citizen is greater than the cost to the government. Many begin in community college because they don't have any other opportunity, or their performance in primary education didn't qualify them for easy access to higher education. I think this idea is great and would afford people like me — whose prime directive is to avoid debt — to obtain formal education, and ultimately a career. We can begin to sow back to others what was so generously given to us.” — **Megan Marschand Pierceall**

“When education is shifted to job training why should the individual be financially burdened by the ‘job creators?’ Especially when the real costs of research and development are already being shifted to public sector universities. The goal of society isn't to create the conditions for multi-millionaires to become multi billionaires. That's not the deal. These are the same conditions that led to the war of independence. Don't quietly permit a new aristocracy to crown themselves.” — **Sean Webb**

“Free isn't cheap!” — **Sara King**

“Funny how no one bats an eyeball when Congress gives away billions ANNUALLY to corporations.” — **Matthew M. May**

Our answers

“I think it's a great idea depending on how it's going to be funded and what type of support will be provided to community colleges to accommodate an

influx of students. There are a lot of positives that would come from a more educated workforce and less financial burden on students, but there are a lot of specifics that still need to be worked out with President Obama's proposal." — **Lauren Slagter**

"I had to borrow for all four years of college, and I saved significantly by attending a community college for the first two years. If those years had been tuition-free, I could have graduated with less debt than I did. Heck, I might even see a light at the end of the debt tunnel. I graduated from my community college with a 4.0. I think it's incredibly important for young people to get education beyond high school, and even though manufacturing jobs are returning to the U.S., the vast majority of them are skilled. With so much talk about crippling student debt, it would be regrettable if that prevented some young people from pursuing additional education." — **Jill Bond**

"Post-high school education has become about as big a business as the health care industry, so any effort to lessen that burden on students and their parents is a step in the right direction. Many of these grant programs become problematic when there is no accountability for the student who just uses the free money as a way to prolong having to get a real job or make a decision about their future. If a student is willing to work hard for the grades, then he or she should be rewarded with a discount on the cost of that education." — **Rodney Ogle**

"I'm not very bothered by the plan but would be more interested in addressing the rise in college education over the last 25 years. From my very infrequent, random sample of talking to parents sending kids to college in the last few years, the cost of attending state-funded schools has risen much faster than inflation since when I was in college." — **Pedro Velazco**

"First of all, anyone complaining about the cost of this can just take a seat. I'm not even trying to hear that. When you compare \$60 billion over 10 years to everything else we manage to find money for in this country, it amounts to a rounding error. We've somehow found more than \$2 trillion to dump into the war in Iraq, with more on the way. We've somehow found almost \$13 billion to build a new aircraft carrier, even though we already have 10 in service and our closest competitors in this arena have only two. Heck, we spend around \$60 billion on corporate welfare; and that's just per year, not 10 years. Now, as far as this community college proposal, it's a great start, but we need to dig deeper on this issue. We should hone this proposal on producing graduates focused on careers fixing and making things, like STEM-related fields. We should also concentrate on lowering the bill for everyone, not just community college students. The cost of college has skyrocketed 12-fold in the last three decades. Eliminating student debt and increasing our skilled workforce is an investment we can't afford to ignore." — **Rob Burgess**

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